

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-W.VA.) and Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) challenged Congress and the Administration today to act and pass legislation to provide every child with health care. The MediKids Health Insurance Act, reintroduced today, would provide universal health care for our nation's children through a new Medicare-like national program with benefits tailored toward children. The bill's reintroduction coincides with "Cover the Uninsured Week," a weeklong series of national and local activities that began yesterday to raise public awareness about the plight of the more than 41 million Americans without health insurance.

"Today, more than 9 million American children are without health care coverage," Rep. Stark said. "Inadequate health care has a real impact on these children's lives. In addition to having poorer health and higher mortality rates, these children miss more school, have lower educational achievement, and are less successful as adults in the workforce. Providing access to health care coverage is a basic investment in these children's futures."

"Every child in this country has the right to grow up healthy and strong, yet many go without basic health care because their parents are unable to afford soaring insurance costs," Rockefeller said. "Both Congress and the administration keep saying that health care is a priority, but have done little to help even our children get basic health care. It is time to stop talking about doing something, and act. We must seize the opportunity now to guarantee that future generations of children, no matter how much money their parents make, grow up healthier than ever before."

MediKids will guarantee health insurance for all children in the United States regardless of family income. Parents will be charged a small monthly premium on their annual income tax returns for all months during the year when no other form of health insurance was available to cover their children. For those months when parents do have access to other sources of health insurance, they will be exempt from this premium. The program also includes graduated discounts to assist low-income families with any premium or cost-sharing costs associated with MediKids.

Numerous child advocates and the health care professionals support the MediKids Health Insurance Act, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Defense Fund, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Nurses Association, Consumers Union, the March of Dimes, the National Association of Community Health Centers, the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems, the National Health Law Program, the National Association of Children's Hospitals and NETWORK, a Catholic Social Justice Lobby.